Panasonic Solution Report

TOUGHBOOK

Entertainment

A livelier stadium experience! Next-generation ticketing solutions made possible by TOUGHBOOK.

PIA Corporation and Gamba Osaka Co., Ltd.

Next-generation ticketing solutions

Platform: **TOUGHBOOK**

Introduced in: November, 2018

Issue

There is little information about the people who are visiting the stadium. Laptop-based solutions tend to be heavy and awkward, making it difficult for staff to quickly move between entry gates or to coordinate events.

Solution

The introduction of the One Touch Pass entry management system has allowed the stadium to identify visitors with season tickets who have entered the stadium using smart cards. The TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1 devices used are rugged and easy to carry around.

> Better marketing, based on the data gathered, has led to a 120% increase in the average number of attendees at league matches compared to the previous year.

Naoto Ohshitamoto
Manager - Fan Marketing
Sports Solution Promotion Department,
Live and Entertainment Division
PIA Corporation

Background

The enhanced visualization of attendee information is the key to attracting more visitors and so every J League club team is working toward this

Gamba Osaka has seen a rapid growth in the number of its attendees. In 2016, when the new Panasonic Stadium Suita was opened, the average number of attendees at J1 League games exceeded through to 25,000. Despite temporarily sluggish growth in the number of attendees from 2017, the average number of attendees in 2019 stood at 29,130 (as of the 23rd game of the season on August 18), a club record at the stadium. The stadium is busier than ever. But this upswing is not only due to heightened national interest in football with the approach of sports events in 2020. The real reason is new onsite efforts that club teams have been starting in recent years to more deeply engage with individual fans. PIA Corporation, a leader in next-generation ticket sales, is working alongside Gamba Osaka to make improvements.

Why TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1 was chosen

The difficulty of marketing without understanding attendees—PIA and Gamba Osaka take on the challenge of customer information visualization

Last year, a total of roughly 400,000 visitors attended games at Gamba Osaka's home stadium, Panasonic Stadium Suita. That number included not only core supporters who had been cheering on their team for years, but also many casual fans who only come to see a game a few times a year. Among their number, there were even quite a few people who were attending a J League game for the first time. PIA Corporation, which supports club operations, has been providing ongoing backing in recent years in order to construct a system that will allow Gamba Osaka to further deepen its relationship with these differing kinds of attendees. Naoto Ohshitamoto, from PIA's Fan Marketing Department, commented on this, saying, "The key issue that these club teams have been grappling with is that they don't know 'who' is coming to the stadium in the first place." That led to them deciding they needed to better understand their attendees.

A stadium well-known for its fun and intense games

The Panasonic Stadium Suita is a football stadium located in Expo '70 Commemorative Park, which is in the city of Suita in Osaka Prefecture. It is the home stadium of Gamba Osaka, a J League team and can accommodate 40,000 people. The stadium's stands are extremely close to the pitch, allowing attendees to really feel the excitement, and the stadium is known for its excellent view of the action from any seat thanks to its sloped stands.

■ Located in: Osaka, Japan

▲ The official store, Blu SPAZIO, as well as the museum, Blu STORIA, are attached to the stadium

Effects after introduction of the new system using TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1

The new One Touch Pass system, which incorporates around 50 FZ-N1 units

Solving the issues the stadium faced required looking at more than just the benefits to the club. Yusuke Takahashi and other members of PIA's Business Systems Promotion Department asked themselves if it wasn't possible to make watching football games even more exciting by educating attendees as to the advantages of electronic ticketing over paper tickets. This then became the thinking behind their plan—a plan that doesn't just cover admission authentication, but also involves linking all services inside the stadium, such as event participation and the sale of goods, to an electronic ticket ID in order to provide visitors with a more fun and convenient stadium experience. That is the essence of the new Stadium Service Platform concept. The team believed that if this system could allow operational staff to get an accurate view of attendees, the stadium would be able to provide better, individualized hospitality, such as providing thorough guidance announcements for people who are visiting the stadium for the first time that day or offering special presents to those who frequently show up at games. Such hospitality would, in turn, increase the number of electronic ticket users and improve attendee satisfaction even further.

Enhanced mobility at locations that have adopted TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1

However, a point of discussion arose—what kind of device should be adopted at stadiums where the overall services have been converted to an advanced digital platform? For a device being used at a stadium, ruggedness is indispensable. In the hustle and bustle of on-site operations, it is likely that accidents could occur—users could knock the devices into something, or drop them. Plus, the devices are always being exposed to rain and dust at entry gates and event venues. The conventional One Touch Pass system used barcode readers connected to TOUGHBOOK laptops. While TOUGHBOOK laptops are rugged and dust- and water-proof, there has been a flurry of opinions from Gamba Osaka asking for more of an emphasis on ease of handling in order to better respond to attendees with electronic tickets in future. Narumi Omura, who has been involved in day-to-day onsite operations commented, saying, "Since the conventional TOUGHBOOK laptops were quite heavy, male staff members would have to load them on a cart the day before and transport them to where they would be used. Also, in addition to the labor involved in getting the devices ready, when we needed to make rush changes to the onsite layout, it wasn't easy to respond to those needs immediately." PIA listened to opinions such as these, and suggested using TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1 in the new system, as it is a convenient, hand-held device that is at once both rugged and lightweight. Since FZ-N1 weighs in at around 274 g, it won't be a burden to organizing staff, even if staff hang the device around their necks all day. They can be freely used no matter the location—be it at entry gates, event venues, or storefronts. While up until now external equipment was required in order to scan electronic tickets, the FZ-N1 console is capable of scanning barcodes and QR codes. Thanks to these capabilities, and its ability to streamline the system, TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1 was chosen.

Marketing to attract customers contributes to more attendees and more fan club members

All these efforts culminated in November of 2018, when PIA and Gamba Osaka ran a proof-of-concept trial for one day only so that a large number of stadium visitors could experience the Stadium Service Platform run on TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1, and to gauge their reactions. During the event, all visitors who came to the game with paper tickets were provided with bracelet-type wearable devices, which converted all their tickets to an electronic format. This was a major experiment to give the roughly 28,000 people who visited that day a taste of the future of electronic ticketing at stadiums. Naoto Ohshitamoto looked back on that day, saying, "We were able to show off our new stadium service outlook, without any major confusion." Visitor comments were positive and showed how successful the trial had been at overcoming the hurdles presented by implementing electronic ticketing—"It was fun getting to experience this," and "It wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be." While prior to the trial roughly 30% of people were using electronic ticketing, that figure rose sharply to about 40% afterward.

▲TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1 weighs only around 274 g, so it can be used anywhere, and can even be worn around the neck all day.

▲There's no labor involved in setting up the palm-sized TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1. It's light enough to be taken anywhere.

▲One-touch authentication makes for a smooth experience even at the most crowded gates. It also benefits from being able to scan a wide variety of electronic ticket formats.

▲Further steps in marketing to attract visitors and contribute toward more attendees and more fan club members.

Future prospects

A vision for regional revitalization, linking stadiums with local businesses

PIA has spoken of their desire to offer support to other club teams in the J League and for other sports such as rugby in the future. They appear to be drawing up a vision for regional revitalization that links stadiums with local businesses. It appears likely that new ideas in next-generation ticketing solutions will enable a more accelerated pace of management that will connect individual fans, with completely different genders, ages, and backgrounds, with the teams they follow.

Naoto Ohshitamoto
Manager - Fan Marketing
Sports Solution Promotion Department,
Live and Entertainment Division
PIA Corporation

Yusuke Takahashi
System Strategy Office and
Unit Manager of Solution Development Unit,
Business Systems Promotion Department,
Systems Division
PIA Corporation

Masayuki Komori
Ticketing Manager, Planning Section
Customer Creation Division
Gamba Osaka Co., Ltd.

Hokuto Murayama
Ticketing Manager, Planning Section
Customer Creation Division
Gamba Osaka Co., Ltd.

Narumi Omura
Fan Club Manager, Planning Section
Customer Creation Division
Gamba Osaka Co., Ltd.

Device used in the new system

A rugged, 4.7-inch, hand-held device
TOUGHBOOK FZ-N1

*Please be aware that this is not intended to guarantee that the anti-shock, anti-vibration, and dust-, water-, and environmental-resistant properties of this product will keep it free from damage and defects.

Published: September 2019